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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 HILLAH 000048

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BABIL'S FAINT-HEARTED GOVERNOR

REF: A) HILLAH 0010, B) HILLAH 0012, C) HILLAH 0017

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CLASSIFIED BY: Charles F. Hunter, Babil PRT Leader, REO
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (U) This is a PRT Babil cable.

12. (S) Summary and comment: The governor of Babil, reeling under the triple impact of a revolt in the provincial council (and the loss of his closest ally there), a public whispering campaign against him and an increasingly assertive Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM), suddenly developed heart trouble in mid-March. After not finding U.S. assistance forthcoming for transportation abroad based on the suspicious documentation his doctor provided, the governor headed to Iran. Although he apparently does have some kind of minor heart condition, his health complaints are far more likely a convenient cover for a decision to lie low until some of the political and security pressures in the province subside. End summary and comment.

FIGHTING FOR POLITICAL LIFE~

13. (S) Since mid-February, Babil Governor Salem Saleh Mehdi Al-Muslimawi has been in the fight of his short political life. Public dissatisfaction with him had been growing for months (ref A), but more recently his support has been eroding even within his own party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Governor Salem is a protege of SCIRI's leader, Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim, while another group of SCIRI members in the Provincial Council (PC) bears greater loyalty to a local leader and former confidant of Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani named Sayyid Rasool. The Sayyid Rasool faction, led by the council chair, attempted a frontal assault on the governor in mid-February but was unable to muster the two-thirds vote needed to remove him. The fallback was to name a committee to look into charges of incompetence and corruption. Governor Salem came to at least two PC meetings to defend himself and by early March the waters appeared to be calming.

14. (C) Three things then went wrong for the governor. First he lost his closest ally in the PC, Ali Al-Qasir, in an automobile crash on March 1. (Note: Al-Qasir had a reputation for bad driving and caused the accident, which also killed two female pedestrians and injured three fellow PC members riding in the car. End note.) Next a lengthy anonymous flier (text provided below, para 9) full of specific charges against the governor appeared in Al-Hillah. Few people knew of the flier at first but then several local news agencies got wind of it and ran stories on their websites, making it common knowledge.

(Comment: The level of detail in the document suggests some involvement by PC members or others close to the council. End comment.)

15. (SBU) Finally the security situation deteriorated abruptly following an attempt by JAM on the police chief in Al-Kifl - coincidentally the governor's hometown - on March 14. The muscular response from Hillah SWAT ("Scorpion Forces") yielded some 35 arrests, in the course of which the Al-Kifl branch of the JAM-affiliated Office of the Martyr Sadr was torched. In response JAM tried to assassinate the SWAT commander with a roadside bomb on March 17 and has subsequently carried out more than 15 other attacks on SWAT personnel in Al-Hillah, including planting explosives outside officers' homes (the latter tactic seemingly aimed more to intimidate than to harm).

~THOUGH NOT FOR LIFE ITSELF

16. (C) On the evening of March 19 the governor's private physician, Dr. Ali, contacted the PRT's translator asking to speak to the team leader. The call was to convey a request from the governor for U.S. assistance in transporting him to a facility in Baghdad or abroad where he could receive treatment for what was characterized as a life-threatening heart condition. (Comment: Iraqi President Talabani had been flown to Amman earlier in the month for hospitalization, a fact that may not have been lost on the governor. End comment.) The next day, after Dr. Ali had been unable to produce medically convincing evidence of a true health emergency, he and the governor took matters into their own hands and departed for Iran. An attendee at the March 28 Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee meeting informed the PRT team leader that the governor had undergone "a procedure" and could be back as early as the end of the week.

COMMENT

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17. (S) The alleged health crisis appears to have been primarily a smokescreen. The governor apparently did have some minor heart trouble but was nowhere near the verge of cardiac failure, as Dr. Ali had initially claimed. According to a locally engaged staff member at the REO who is a doctor by training, the person whose heart produced the EKG that Dr. Ali showed us would have been dead within 24 hours and could not have survived air travel even to Baghdad, let alone Iran or Jordan.

18. (S) Comment, continued: The more likely explanation for Governor Salem's hasty departure is his reluctance to be caught in the middle of a Shia-on-Shia clash. JAM has almost certainly gained men, expertise and materiel in Babil, which borders Baghdad to the south, during Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon, putting the militia in a better position to assert itself in its traditional stronghold of Al-Kifl and now with increasing boldness in the provincial capital itself. The governor, already under attack politically, may simply have decided that he didn't have the stomach - or heart - for actual battles so close to home. Assuming he returns anytime soon from Iran, where he lived for more than two decades prior to Iraq's 2003 liberation, his failure of nerve will scarcely have enhanced his stature with citizens or the PC. End comment.

19. (SBU) Following is a PRT translation of the flier that began circulating in Al-Hillah on March 14.

BEGIN TEXT

ADMINISTRATIVE INCOMPETENCE OF THE BABIL GOVERNOR

1. Returning Mr. Nawfal to the Al-Kifl Municipality despite his dismissal by the Provincial Council.

2. Traveling to the hajj for the second consecutive year,

despite his deputy's absence on travel abroad, at unknown cost to the province's 2007 budget.

¶3. Renovation of the guest house with public funds although the building was leased.

¶4. Issuing an administrative order appointing the director of audits the director of accounts, which shows that the governor has no administrative skills that qualify him for the job of governor because his order turned the auditor into the accountant.

¶5. Not carrying out PC decisions, especially those concerning the dismissal of corrupt figures in provincial departments.

¶6. Dispensing rewards to his protective detail and other unauthorized individuals from the provincial development account, coinciding with a drop in revenues, in contravention of public finance laws.

¶7. Giving his protective detail millions of dinars as bonuses during the 'Eid al-Fitr from the budgets of Al-Hillah, Al-Mashru', Al-Madhatiya and Al-Musayyib Municipalities.

¶8. Depleting all bonus and contract funds for municipalities and water, specifically depleting the Hillah Municipality budget in August 2006, and then filing a complaint with the minister against the director general of the municipality despite having spent some 50 million dinars on personal bonuses.

¶9. Purchasing a gift (a fan), putting it in the warehouse and then trying to recover it; the warehouse manager objected and informed him that the fan must be returned because it is registered as the property of the state.

¶10. The daily and constant delay of correspondence in the governor's office, sometimes for more than a month, causing delays in projects because it (the office) authorizes disbursements.

¶11. Diverting the municipality's efforts on a road to Al-Kifl; it later became clear that the roadway was incorrect, leading to CHF's refusal to fund it.

¶12. Issuing memos from the administrative office, signed by the governor, for laboratory tests (of project materials) rather than from the engineering department or the projects operations cell authorized to issue such memos.

¶13. Not using his authority to remove trespassers until the issue reached unacceptable levels, showing his ineffectiveness.

¶14. Not enabling the lessee of the stockyard in Al-Hillah to use the property, which he had rented for 350 million dinars per year, because a squatter was using it; if one doesn't protect the rights of an individual, how can one protect the rights of all?

¶15. The deputy governor stated to the PC at its meeting on Saturday, February 17 that approval of some bids containing irregularities had been transferred to the governor (meaning that approval is tribal!).

¶16. Establishing official and unnecessary positions, such as appointing his brother Sami the general supervisor of departments in the Al-Kifl district and Ali Al-Safi as general supervisor of Abu Gharaq departments, thus creating problems between the officials and themselves.

¶17. Contractors are being paid without presenting receipts, merely after signing small pieces of paper that are then presented to the accounting office and paid.

¶18. Asking, or actually obliging, contractors to donate to the

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Al-Hillah Chamber of Commerce, whose funds were spent by the governor's orders.

¶19. Intercession by the governor's advisors on behalf of a female employee in the municipality in connection with a piece of property where the Abu Gharaq fuel station is located; the details of this case have been registered with the Integrity Commission for anyone who wants to investigate the matter.

¶20. Acquiring without proper authorization two electrical generators registered to the Babil Antiquities Department, then claiming that they were for the Babil Water Department whose director denied ever receiving them; no one knows where they went.

¶21. Working on the principle of diesel for stabilizer (sic) and without authorization.

¶22. Not completing payments for 2006, in worse fashion than other provinces, after getting oral approval to do so from the prime minister in his meeting with governors. This approval was

supposed to be the basis of an official memo to the accounting department to continue payments; the director of the accounting department confirmed that a memo from the governor with the PM's verbal instructions would have been sufficient to continue payments but a delay in this regard led to delayed payments and resulted in the halting of projects. The verbal approval was followed by an official memo from the director of the Council of Ministers on December 17, 2006 stating that the cabinet had decided that contracts that had been approved and funded but not completed in 2006 should be moved to the 2007 fiscal year. When 2006 funds became available the governor did not agree to work in this fashion like the other provinces did, which cost the province a large part of its budget for the current fiscal year.

¶23. What is hidden may be even worse.

¶24. All this was because of disputes between parties and holders of positions.

END TEXT
HUNTER